

Handbook assists spouses in adapting to Army's culture

By Spc. Jimmy Norris

The Army is a world of its own that can be as unnerving as a first visit to a foreign country. It has its own culture, customs and even its own language. Acronyms like BAH, PX and ACS are all part of a soldier's daily lexicon. Soldiers don't sit down to dinner at 6 p.m. They eat chow at 1800. Even to new soldiers, military life can sometimes be confusing. To spouses, who are thrown into in the military community without any introduction, it can be somewhat daunting.

But help is on the way. *The Spouse's Handbook*, an online resource for soldiers' spouses, is scheduled for a tentative release date Feb. 1. *The Spouse's Handbook* is an initiative of Sgt. Maj. of the Army Jack Tilley, who wanted a book for young spouses who are unaware of what's available to them within the Army support network said *The Spouse's Handbook* editor, Billy Williams, a training specialist assigned to the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy Directorate of Training and Doctrine.

While the book's target audience is the spouses of soldiers who are graduating the Primary Leadership Development Course, *The Spouse's Handbook* is designed for the spouses of soldiers of all ranks, and military occupational specialties or branches, Williams said.

"The protocol used for a junior enlisted spouse is same as that used for a senior enlisted [soldier's] or officer's spouse," Williams explained.

The book offers information on military customs and courtesies, services and problem solving. The book includes chapters on Army Family Team Building, Family Advocacy and social functions. It spells out military acronyms, military time and traditions, and includes a directory of useful services.

"It's designed mainly for spouses who don't know much about the military," said Shirley West, one of the main contributors to *The Spouse's Handbook*. With 30 years experience as an Army spouse, West has been a part of the soldier-spouse-Army team as her husband has risen through the ranks from private to command sergeant major. She's the veteran of 16 permanent change of station moves. She's held down the homefront and survived on her own through what's added up to 10 years of accumulated field time and countless temporary duty assignments. She's also



served as advisor for several family readiness groups. "When a soldier is about to become a sergeant, [*The Spouse's Handbook*] explains to the soldier's spouse what the new sergeant's job will be and what the spouse's role will be should she choose to participate."

"The military is now using a husband-and-wife-team concept," added Williams. "This is a tool that will equip the spouse to be a member of [the] team in the military support chain."

Williams started working on the handbook in November 2001. Shortly after finishing the first draft of *The Spouse's Handbook* five months later, he sent a copy of the 10-page booklet to West, who'd helped write *The Handbook for New Army Spouses*, a guide offered by Fort Campbell's Army Community Service, and asked for her input.

Together West and Williams began polling spouses throughout the Army to find out what they felt they needed to know. They e-mailed more than 100 people and enlisted the help of every major command sergeant major in the Army.

"I compiled a lot of information people gave me and put it in the guide. [Authorship of *The Spouse's Handbook*] was a combination of all of us who took an interest and wanted to help develop the book," said West.

The result of their efforts is a 39-page booklet aimed at making the military lifestyle easier to understand for the civilian spouses of soldiers.

"It's a how-to and a need-to-know booklet for spouses that are not familiar with the military," said Williams. "It's what every spouse wished they'd known before [their soldiers] reached the senior-NCO [or] senior-officer level. There's not a lot of military jargon and it's pretty easy reading."

West explained that *The Spouse's Handbook* is a living document. In fact, the Feb. 1 release is just the first edition.

"By no means do we know everything," she said. "We're going to solicit feedback for updates and additions. Since it's online we can update without the cost of producing new books."

The Spouse's Handbook, which according to Williams will be easy to download, will be posted online at <http://usasma.bliss.army.mil>. First click on "Training and Doctrine", then "PLDC" and finally "What's New."